

THAT WHICH IS CLAIMED:

1. A combined carrier shipping system for shipping a plurality of packages, said combined carrier shipping system comprising:

a first carrier physical delivery system capable of delivering one of the packages to a consignee location;

5 a second carrier physical delivery system also capable of delivering the package to the consignee location; and

a shipment ordering system connected in communication with the first carrier physical delivery system, wherein the shipment ordering system is configured to:

10 record a request to ship the package and package information associated with the package, said package information including at least the consignee location for delivery of the package,

determine whether the consignee location meets a stored condition for single carrier delivery by the first carrier physical delivery system,

15 in response to the single carrier condition being met, initiate delivery by the first carrier physical delivery system from a starting location to the consignee location, and

20 in response to the single carrier condition not being met, initiate delivery of the package by the first carrier physical delivery system from the starting location to an intermediate location for further delivery by the second carrier physical delivery system to the consignee location.

2. A combined carrier system of Claim 1, wherein the single carrier condition is that single carrier delivery by the first carrier system be more efficient than delivery by at least the first and second carriers.

3. A combined carrier system of Claim 2, wherein the shipment ordering system is configured to determine whether the consignee location is efficient by comparing a zip code of the consignee location to an efficient delivery area of the first carrier.

4. A combined carrier system of Claim 3, wherein the shipment ordering system is configured to determine the intermediate location using the zip code of the consignee location.

5. A combined carrier system of Claim 4, wherein the intermediate location is a local post office corresponding to the zip code of the consignee location.

6. A combined carrier system of Claim 5, wherein the second carrier physical delivery system is part of a governmental postal service.

7. A combined carrier system of Claim 1, wherein the shipment ordering system is further configured to generate a first carrier tracking symbol and a second carrier tracking symbol in response to determination that the single carrier condition has not been met.

8. A combined carrier system of Claim 7, wherein the shipment ordering system is configured to generate a label image including first carrier label indicia describing at least the intermediate location and the first carrier tracking symbol and second carrier label indicia describing at least the consignee location and the second carrier tracking symbol, each of said first and second carrier label indicia being recognizable by the first and second carrier physical delivery systems, respectively.

9. A combined carrier system of Claim 8, further comprising a first carrier tracking system connected in communication with a plurality of first carrier scanning devices positioned along a first carrier physical delivery route from the starting to the intermediate locations, said first carrier tracking system being configured to record scanning of the first carrier tracking symbol by the first carrier scanning devices.

10. A combined carrier system of Claim 9, further comprising a second carrier tracking system connected in communication with a second carrier scanning device positioned at the consignee location, said second carrier tracking system being further configured to record scanning of the second carrier tracking symbol by the second carrier scanning device.

11. A combined carrier system of Claim 10, further comprising a verification system connected in electronic communication with the shipment ordering and tracking systems, wherein said verification system is configured to obtain the package information from the shipment ordering system and tracking information from the tracking systems, and is further configured to correlate the tracking information and package information using the tracking symbols so as to create a billing manifest.

12. A combined carrier system of Claim 11, wherein at least one of the carrier delivery systems is configured to return the package to a shipper location if unable to obtain a signature of a consignee at the consignee location, wherein one of the carrier tracking systems includes a scanning device at the shipper location configured to scan one of the tracking symbols to record return of the package to the shipper location and wherein the verification system is further configured to correlate the tracking information evidencing return of the package to the shipper location and the package information using the tracking symbols.

13. A combined carrier system of Claim 12, wherein the verification system is further configured to adjust the billing manifest for return of the package to the shipper location.

14. A combined carrier system of Claim 13, wherein the adjustment is an additional charge for return of the package.

15. A combined carrier system of Claim 12, wherein the at least one of the carrier delivery systems configured to return the package is also configured to return the package to a holding location for a limited period of time while awaiting potential pickup by the consignee.

16. A shipping information system for facilitating shipping of one or more packages by a first and second carriers, said shipping information system comprising:
a shipper information system configured to record package information, including a consignee address of the package, and of comparing the consignee address to a stored delivery area of the first carrier, said shipper computer system further configured

to generate, in response to determining that the consignee address is not within the stored delivery area of the first carrier, a combined shipping label image containing the package information, a first carrier tracking symbol, a second carrier tracking symbol and an address of an intermediate location at which the second carrier is configured to obtain the package and complete delivery to the consignee address.

17. A shipping information system of Claim 16, further comprising a first carrier information system comprising:

a package information system connected in communication with the shipper information system and configured to obtain the package information and first carrier tracking symbol therefrom;

a tracking system connected in communication with a first carrier scanning device positioned at least at the intermediate location, said tracking system configured to determine when the scanning device has scanned the first carrier tracking symbol of the package at the intermediate location; and

a verification system connected in communication with the package information system and the tracking system, said verification system configured to obtain package information and tracking information from the respective systems and of using the first carrier tracking symbol to combine the package information and tracking information into a billing manifest for submission to the second carrier.

18. A shipping information system of Claim 17, wherein the package information system is also configured to obtain the second carrier tracking symbol from the shipper information system; and

wherein said tracking system is connected in communication with, and configured to receive delivery confirmation information from, a second carrier scanning device positioned at the consignee location, said delivery confirmation information corresponding to scanning of the second carrier tracking symbol of the package at the consignee location by the second carrier scanning device.

19. A shipping information system of Claim 18, wherein said verification system is further configured to correlate the delivery confirmation information with the

package information and tracking information using the second carrier tracking symbol and combine the delivery confirmation information with the package information and tracking information in the billing manifest.

20. A shipping information system of Claim 18, further comprising a second
5 carrier computer system connected in communication with, and configured to obtain the billing manifest from, the verification system, said second carrier computer system being configured to display the billing manifest for audit by the second carrier.

21. A shipping information system of Claim 18, further comprising a quality
10 control system connected in communication with the verification system and the tracking system, said quality control system configured to compare the delivery confirmation information with the billing manifest to ensure that the package listed on the billing manifest has been delivered.

22. A shipping information system of Claim 18, further comprising a quality
15 control system connected in communication with the package information system and the shipper information system, said quality control system configured to periodically compile package information associated with the packages and received by the package information system, and further configured to send the compiled package information to the shipper information system for comparison to package information recorded by the shipper information system.

20 23. A shipping information system of Claim 18, further comprising a quality control system configured to record package sizes and weights as part of the package information and further configured to record subsequent measurements of package sizes and weights and compare the subsequently measured sizes and weights to the sizes and weights of the package information.

25 24. A shipping information system of Claim 16, wherein the consignee address includes a zip code and wherein the shipper information system is configured to compare the zip code to a list of zip codes within the stored delivery area of the first carrier.

25. A shipping information system of Claim 16, wherein the intermediate location is a local post office and the second carrier is governmental postal service.

26. A combined carrier shipping system for shipping a plurality of packages, said combined carrier shipping system comprising:

- 5 a primary carrier physical delivery system;
- one or more secondary carrier physical delivery systems; and
- a shipment ordering system connected in communication with the primary carrier physical delivery system, wherein the shipment ordering system is configured to:
 - record a request to ship one of the packages and package
 - 10 information associated with the package, said package information including at least a consignee location for delivery of the package,
 - determine whether the consignee location meets a stored efficiency condition for single carrier delivery by the primary carrier physical delivery system,
 - in response to the single carrier efficiency condition being met,
 - 15 initiate delivery by the primary carrier physical delivery system from a starting location to the consignee location, and
 - in response to the single carrier efficiency condition not being met, initiate delivery of the package by the primary carrier physical delivery system from the starting location to an intermediate location for further delivery by one or more of the
 - 20 secondary carrier physical delivery systems to the consignee location.

27. A combined carrier system of Claim 26, wherein the shipment ordering system is configured to determine whether the consignee location meets the efficiency condition by comparing a zip code of the consignee location to an efficient delivery area of the primary carrier.

28. A combined carrier system of Claim 27, wherein the shipment ordering system is configured to determine the intermediate location using the zip code of the consignee location.

29. A combined carrier system of Claim 28, wherein the intermediate location is a local post office.

30. A combined carrier system of Claim 29, wherein one of the secondary carrier physical delivery systems is part of a governmental postal service.

31. A combined carrier system of Claim 28, wherein the shipment ordering system is further configured to generate a primary carrier tracking symbol and at least one secondary carrier tracking symbol in response to determination that the single carrier condition has not been met.

32. A combined carrier system of Claim 31, wherein the shipment ordering system is configured to generate a label image including first carrier label indicia describing at least the intermediate location and the first carrier tracking symbol and secondary carrier label indicia describing at least the consignee location and the secondary carrier tracking symbol, each of said first and second carrier label indicia being recognizable by the first and second carrier physical delivery systems, respectively.

33. A computer system for routing delivery of a package by a plurality of carriers each having one of a plurality of physical delivery systems wherein delivery is requested by a shipper computer system, said computer system comprising:

an initial carrier computer system connected in electronic communication with the carrier physical delivery system of an initial one of the carriers and the shipper computer system, said initial carrier computer system:

configured to obtain package information data from the shipper computer system, said package information data including a consignee address;

configured to determine whether at least some of the package information data meets a stored condition for single carrier delivery,

configured to instruct the initial carrier physical delivery system to deliver one of the packages to the consignee address in response to the single carrier condition being met, and

configured to determine an intermediate location at which a subsequent one of the carriers is configured to receive the package in response to the single carrier condition not being met; and

a subsequent carrier computer system connected in communication with the initial carrier computer system and a subsequent one of the carrier physical delivery systems, said subsequent carrier computer system:

5 configured to obtain the package information data, including the consignee address, and the intermediate location from the initial carrier computer system; configured to receive instructions from the initial carrier computer system to receive the package at the intermediate location and complete delivery to the consignee address; and

10 configured to send the package information data, including the consignee address, and the intermediate location to the subsequent carrier physical delivery system and instructing the subsequent carrier delivery system to obtain the package at the intermediate location and complete delivery of the package to the consignee address.

34. A computer system of Claim 33, wherein the package information data
15 includes an initial carrier tracking number and wherein the initial carrier computer system is configured to communicate with a scanning device of the initial carrier physical delivery system to receive tracking data indicating detection of the initial carrier tracking number at the intermediate location by the scanning device, said initial carrier computer system also configured to electronically notify the subsequent carrier tracking system of
20 arrival of the package at the intermediate location.

35. A computer system of Claim 34, wherein the package information data also includes a subsequent carrier tracking number and wherein the subsequent carrier computer system is configured to communicate with a scanning device of the subsequent carrier physical delivery system to receive tracking data indicating detection of the
25 subsequent carrier tracking number at the consignee location, said subsequent carrier computer system configured to notify the first carrier computer system of detection of the subsequent carrier tracking number at the consignee address.

36. A computer system of Claim 35, wherein the initial carrier computer system is further configured to combine the package information data with the tracking

data indicating detection of the package at the intermediate location into an electronic billing manifest using the initial carrier tracking number and wherein the initial carrier computer system is configured to bill the subsequent carrier by transmitting the electronic billing manifest to the subsequent carrier computer system.

5 37. A computer system of Claim 36, wherein the initial carrier computer system is also configured to combine the tracking data indicating detection of the package at the consignee address with the package information data in the billing manifest using the subsequent carrier tracking number.

10 38. A computer system of Claim 37, wherein the subsequent carrier computer system is configured to display the billing manifest for audit.

39. A computer system of Claim 37, wherein the subsequent carrier computer system is configured to compare the electronic billing manifest with the tracking data indicating detection of the package at the consignee address to confirm delivery of the package on the electronic billing manifest.

15 40. A computer system of Claim 39, wherein the initial carrier computer system is configured to obtain from the shipper computer system a compilation of package information data on a plurality of packages and is further configured to periodically compare the package information data to the compilation of package information data to confirm receipt of the package information data from the shipper
20 computer system.

41. A computer system of Claim 40, wherein the initial carrier computer system is configured to electronically transmit at least one of the package information data, the tracking data and the electronic billing manifest to the shipper computer system or a consignee computer system.

25 42. A computer system of Claim 37, wherein the initial carrier computer system is further configured to generate cost of shipment data, including costs associated with delivery of the package by one or more participating carriers, generating an

electronic invoice including the cost of shipment data and transmitting the electronic invoice to the shipper computer.

43. A computer system of Claim 42, wherein the cost of shipment data includes a cost of delivery to the intermediate location by the initial carrier and a cost of
5 delivery to the consignee location by the subsequent carrier.

44. A computer system of Claim 43, wherein the initial carrier computer system is configured to control receipt of funds from the shipper computer system for payment of the invoice, debiting an amount of the funds for shipment services provided by the initial carrier and depositing a remaining amount of the funds in an escrow
10 account.

45. A computer system of Claim 44, wherein the subsequent carrier computer system is electronically connected to the escrow account and is configured to withdraw funds from the escrow account for shipping services provided by the subsequent carrier and is also configured to compare the amount of the funds debited by the initial carrier to
15 the electronic billing manifest.

46. A method of routing delivery of a package by a plurality of carriers each having one of a plurality of physical delivery systems, said method of routing comprising:

obtaining package information data, including a consignee address, from a
20 shipper;

determining whether at least some of the package information data meets a condition for single carrier delivery;

instructing the initial carrier physical delivery system to deliver one of the packages to the consignee address in response to the single carrier condition being met;

25 and

determining an intermediate location at which a subsequent one of the carriers is configured to receive the package in response to the single carrier condition not being met.

47. A method of routing delivery of Claim 46, further comprising sending the package information data and the intermediate location to the subsequent carrier physical delivery system and instructing the subsequent carrier physical delivery system to obtain the package at the intermediate location and complete delivery of the package to the
5 consignee address.

48. A method of routing delivery of Claim 47, wherein obtaining the package information data also includes obtaining an initial carrier tracking number and further comprising obtaining tracking data indicating detection of the initial carrier tracking number at the intermediate location using a scanning device of the initial carrier physical
10 delivery system.

49. A method of routing delivery of Claim 48, further comprising notifying the subsequent carrier tracking system of detection of the initial carrier tracking number at the intermediate location.

50. A method of routing delivery of Claim 48, further comprising constructing
15 a billing manifest by correlating, using the initial carrier tracking number, the package information data with the tracking data indicating detection of the initial carrier tracking number at the intermediate location.

51. A method of routing delivery of Claim 50, wherein obtaining the package information data also includes obtaining a subsequent carrier tracking number and further
20 comprising obtaining tracking data indicating detection of the subsequent carrier tracking number at the consignee address using a scanning device of the subsequent carrier physical delivery system.

52. A method of routing delivery of Claim 51, wherein constructing the billing manifest includes correlating, using the subsequent carrier tracking number, the package
25 information with the tracking data indicating detection of the subsequent carrier tracking number at the consignee address.

53. A method of routing delivery of Claim 50, further comprising comparing the electronic billing manifest with the tracking data indicating detection of the

subsequent carrier tracking number at the consignee address to confirm delivery of the package on the electronic billing manifest.

54. A computer program product for routing delivery of a package, the computer program product comprising a computer-readable storage medium having
5 computer-readable program code portions stored therein, the computer-readable program code portions comprising:

a first executable portion for obtaining package information data, including a consignee address, from a shipper computer system;

10 a second executable portion for determining whether at least some of the package information data meets a condition for single carrier delivery;

a third executable portion for instructing an initial carrier physical delivery system to deliver one of the packages to the consignee address in response to the single carrier condition being met; and

15 a fourth executable portion for determining an intermediate location at which a subsequent one of the carriers is configured to receive the package in response to the single carrier condition not being met.

55. A computer program product of Claim 54, further comprising a fifth executable portion for sending the package information data and the intermediate location to the subsequent carrier physical delivery system and instructing a subsequent carrier
20 physical delivery system to obtain the package at the intermediate location and complete delivery of the package to the consignee address.

56. A computer program product of Claim 55, further comprising a sixth executable portion for obtaining an initial carrier tracking number as part of the package information data and obtaining tracking data indicating detection of the initial carrier
25 tracking number at the intermediate location using a scanning device of the initial carrier physical delivery system.

57. A computer program product of Claim 56, further comprising a seventh executable code portion for constructing a billing manifest by correlating, using the initial

carrier tracking number, the package information data with the tracking data indicating detection of the initial carrier tracking number at the intermediate location.

58. A computer program product of Claim 57, further comprising an eighth executable code portion for obtaining a subsequent carrier tracking number as part of the package information data and obtaining tracking data indicating detection of the subsequent carrier tracking number at the consignee address using a scanning device of a subsequent carrier physical delivery system.

59. A computer program product of Claim 58, wherein the seventh executable code portion is further for correlating, using the subsequent carrier tracking number, the package information data with the tracking data indicating detection of the subsequent carrier tracking number at the consignee address.

60. A computer program product of Claim 59, further comprising a ninth executable code portion for comparing the electronic billing manifest with the tracking data indicating detection of the subsequent carrier tracking number at the consignee address to confirm delivery of the package on the electronic billing manifest.

61. A shipping information system for facilitating shipping of one or more packages by a first and second carriers, said shipping information system comprising:
a shipper information system configured to record package information, including a consignee address of the package, and of comparing the consignee address to a stored delivery area of the first carrier, said shipper computer system further configured to generate, in response to determining that the consignee address is not within the stored delivery area of the first carrier, a combined shipping label image containing the package information, a first carrier tracking symbol, a second carrier tracking symbol and an address of an intermediate location at which the second carrier is capable of obtaining the package and completing delivery to the consignee address; and
a first carrier information system comprising:
a package information system connected in communication with the shipper information system and configured to obtain the package information, the

first carrier tracking symbol and the second carrier tracking symbol from the shipper information system;

a tracking system connected in communication with a first scanning device positioned at the intermediate location and a second scanning device positioned at a shipper location, said tracking system configured to determine when the first scanning device has scanned the first carrier tracking symbol of the package at the intermediate location and also configured to determine when the second scanning device has scanned at least one of the tracking symbols of the package at the shipper location as the package is being returned; and

a verification system connected in communication with the package information system and the tracking system, said verification system configured to obtain package information and tracking information from the respective systems and of using the first carrier tracking symbol to combine the package information and tracking information into a billing manifest, said verification system also configured to later modify the billing manifest upon receipt of tracking information indicating scanning of the package at the shipper location by the second scanning device due to return of the package to the shipper location.

62. A shipping information system of Claim 61, wherein the verification system is configured to modify the billing manifest by adding a returned package charge.

63. A carrier information system for facilitating shipping of one or more packages by a first and second carriers, said carrier information system comprising a package information system capable of communicating with a shipper and receiving package information, a first carrier tracking symbol and a second carrier tracking symbol from the shipper;

a tracking system connected in communication with at least a first scanning device positioned at an intermediate location and a second scanning device positioned at a shipper location, said tracking system configured to determine when the first scanning device has scanned the first carrier tracking symbol of the package at the intermediate location prior to release to the second carrier and also configured to determine when the second scanning device has scanned at least one of the first carrier

tracking symbol and the second carrier tracking symbol of the package at the shipper location as the package is being returned; and

a verification system connected in communication with the package information system and the tracking system, said verification system configured to obtain package information and tracking information from the respective systems and of using the first carrier tracking symbol to combine the package information and tracking information into an initial billing manifest, said verification system also configured to later modify the billing manifest upon receipt of tracking information indicating scanning of the package at the shipper location by the second scanning device due to return of the package to the shipper location.

64. A carrier information system of Claim 63, wherein the verification system is configured to modify the billing manifest by adding a returned package charge.

65. A shipping information system for facilitating shipping of one or more packages by a first and second carriers, said shipping information system comprising:
a package information system capable of communicating with a shipper and receiving package information and a first carrier tracking symbol from the shipper;

a tracking system connected in communication with a first carrier scanning device positioned at least at an intermediate location, said tracking system configured to determine when the scanning device has scanned the first carrier tracking symbol of the package at the intermediate location indicating release of the package to the second carrier; and

a verification system connected in communication with the package information system and the tracking system, said verification system configured to obtain package information and tracking information from the respective systems and of using the first carrier tracking symbol to combine the package information and tracking information into a billing manifest for submission to the second carrier.

66. A shipping information system of Claim 65,
wherein the package information system is also configured to obtain a second carrier tracking symbol from the shipper; and

wherein said tracking system is connected in communication with, and configured to receive delivery confirmation information from, a second carrier scanning device positioned at the consignee location, said delivery confirmation information corresponding to scanning of the second carrier tracking symbol of the package at the consignee location by the second carrier scanning device.

67. A shipping information system of Claim 66, wherein said verification system is further configured to correlate the delivery confirmation information with the package information and tracking information using the second carrier tracking symbol and combine the delivery confirmation information with the package information and tracking information in the billing manifest.

68. A shipping information system of Claim 66, further comprising a second carrier computer system connected in communication with, and configured to obtain the billing manifest from, the verification system, said second carrier computer system being configured to display the billing manifest for audit by the second carrier.

69. A shipping information system of Claim 66, further comprising a quality control system connected in communication with the verification system and the tracking system, said quality control system configured to compare the delivery confirmation information with the billing manifest to ensure that the package listed on the billing manifest has been delivered.

70. A shipping information system of Claim 66, further comprising a quality control system connected in communication with the package information system and the shipper information system, said quality control system configured to periodically compile package information associated with the packages and received by the package information system, and further configured to send the compiled package information to the shipper information system for comparison to package information recorded by the shipper information system.

71. A shipping information system of Claim 66, further comprising a quality control system configured to record package sizes and weights as part of the package

information and further configured to record subsequent measurements of package sizes and weights and compare the subsequently measured sizes and weights to the sizes and weights of the package information.